

The Magic Wand Brochures, No. 2

ACK

A

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BY

H. G. SPARKS

The king was slyly fingered from the deck
Shakespeare

DEDICATED
IN GRATITUDE TO THE MEMORY OF
NATE LEIPZIG

GEORGE JOHNSON

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PACK A DECK

The most persistent and erroneous conception about conjuring and sleight-of-hand is displayed in the case of playing-cards. The number of utterly impossible stories I have read, and the number of tales I have been told concerning "card-manipulation" are varied and numerous. Where the effect would sometimes be possible to a good sleight-of-hand exponent, the conditions related—both written and verbal,—preclude all possibility of the effect described.

A good example of showing the credulity of most people in this respect is recounted by that clever card manipulator, the late "Carlton." Attending a whist-drive at a town in which he was performing, he managed to win first prize. Revealing his identity, he relinquished his claim to the prize, with the advice to all present—and which could only have one interpretation!—"never to play cards with a conjuror!" Of course, it was excellent "publicity"; but it was not the "wangling" of cards of which "Carlton" was guilty, but of facts. A few moments reflection on how a whist-drive is managed will prove to anyone that the occasional opportunities one may have for dealing the cards, is not such a persistent factor that it can favour the most expert of card conjurors.

Something of the same thing once happened to myself, though I adopted the finale as a solution out of a very real difficulty: moreover, the effect for which I obtained an unsought reputation, was both possible in fact and in circumstance.

Games with cards hold no attraction for me, though naturally I can take a hand at any of them. The insistence of four billet-companions, one evening, who were playing "Banker," once saw my capitulation. I drew the "bank" on the first cut—and the reader can well imagine the progressive expressions on the faces of my fellow players during the next five rounds when I, as "Banker," turned up an ace *five times in succession!* By the time the third ace was shown, I could *feel* that each player was "remembering" what he had seen some nights previously—*i.e.*, my first magical show (including some card tricks!) at our Unit's concert. By the time the fifth ace was turned up, they were expecting it to appear!

Using—unconsciously, then—the same expression which "Carlton" did to his victims, I laughingly "threw in my hand" after that fifth cut, told them "never to play cards with a conjuror!" and

replaced the stakes back in the "pool." But though my accomplishment, unlike "Carlton's," *would* have been possible, it was actually a piece of unusual fortune that I turned up the series of five aces in succession. It was all straight play on my part. It would have been impossible to have convinced my fellow-players of the coincidence that night, though; and so I made the only compromise possible, and reversing Omar, "accepted the credit and let the cash go."

SHIFTING SAND

In contradistinction to the many devices of a simple nature which, none-the-less, yield a maximum of effect—*i.e.*, the egg-bag; the thumb-tip; the short-card, etc.—there is one that always impressed me as possessing most ingenious devising, but with a relatively poor result. This is the "sand-frame." When one considers that the same result, from an audience's viewpoint, can be obtained by a flap-card, spring-blind, or even a pull-away piece of cloth, the ingenuity of the invention has far more attraction, as such, than has the comparatively mediocre denouement.

Well do I remember the affection I had for my first sand-frame; an affection, however, which I did not allow to be shared with my occasional public. It was this private "playing about" with it, and a vague "artistic regret" at what I felt was a good idea which had not found its best and right interpretation, that evolved the following:—

Performer exhibits the frame in the usual fashion, but it has a back-piece of medium-deep blue—*i.e.*, neither too dark to look black in any light, nor too light to be an indefinite shade, as bordering on "Cambridge blue" would be. The frame is closed by the usual clips, and is set upright, facing the audience, *and uncovered*.

A card is now "selected" by a member of the audience, and after the card has been torn up in the usual way, the pieces are "converted" to a cigarette. (There are a dozen ways of doing this—your own, probably, will be the thirteenth; so we will not stop for details here.) Lighting the cigarette, the performer then picks up the frame from off the table, or stand, and seating himself on a chair, crosses his legs, and seems about to take a complete rest in the middle of the stage, and the middle of his performance. From the moment of handling the frame, however, he has kept this facing the audience; and now, as he smokes, he brings the frame nearer to his face. As the smoke "hits" the front glass of the frame, he says "Watch!—the 'smoke of illusion'—for through the glass and onto the back of the frame the smoke is printing—'something.'"

Note the subtle suggestion that the smoke is printing *onto* the back, which, plus the smoke, helps by vivid suggestion that the card is being slowly and visibly printed—instead of being slowly and visibly *uncovered* by the sand being tilted away from in front of it. Eh? Oh, yes! Blue-coloured sand, which does not look like sand at all! That is why I was so particular, earlier, to mention its exact hue. Card, of course, is introduced via your own favourite method.

Now for a few necessary details and hints.

Remove the usual sand-paper from frame-back. The blue sand used for sand-and-water effect, purchasable from the usual dealers, is the variety you require. This varies a little in "texture," and the very finest is preferable. After gumming some of this onto a piece of thin cardboard, and cutting the latter to the size required, attach it to the back of the frame. Seven out of ten of the usual sand-frames do not exactly match their colours of sand-paper to their actual sand. This objection is nullified somewhat by the fact that some interim elapses before the audience are shown the actual sand between the glasses, and which purports to be the actual sand-paper they have seen before. However, the small percentage of an audience who can "carry a colour" on their eye's memory, may just as well be puzzled and unsuspecting as the majority. The gumming of the sand will make it take on a slightly deeper hue, but a dusting of any fine white powder onto the piece, and the later "blowing" of the surface will attain a perfect match.

The dismantling of your sand-frame and the re-assembling of it, after placing the blue-sand in place of the ordinary, is, of course, the major job. You may prefer to construct a new frame entirely; or your dealer may supply you.

On the initial reading of this idea, it may be thought that the necessary reversal of the frame is a drawback, and a piece of obvious and essential "business." Actually, the "play" afforded by the other hand holding the cigarette, and the occasional pushing forward of the head, with smoke jetted from the lips onto the next portion to be "printed," supplies a beautifully natural "cover" which is never detected. My own final corner for the missing piece—eventually found in the end of my cigarette as being unsmokable without burning my lips—I cover with my thumb, which I take out of the way onto the edge of the frame at my last "puff," revealing, of course, the *actual* backing of the card-frame.

Each bit of slow turning of the frame should synchronise with a definite puff of smoke. Should some movement of sand occur after the puff hitting the front glass, it but adds to the illusion—though

this should be minimised as much as possible. Keep the frame absolutely still while *drawing* on the cigarette—hence my advocacy of sitting down, which is easier for balance, as well as having a definite attribute of “different showmanship.”

Also, *do not hurry*. The whole materialisation should take a full minute, at least. It may seem like three minutes to you unless you control your “fidgets,” or you underestimate the interest the beautiful bit of “slow-motion” materialisation has upon the audience’s attention. The odd bits of sand, looking like holes, can all be coaxed down in time under cover of the smoke, and but add to the illusion of a card being slowly formed by smoke.

Give your dealer the job if you haven’t the time or patience for construction yourself. Rehearse to find which corner you must cover at the last for the “missing piece.” This latter will depend in which hands you elect to hold the frame and the cigarette. Sit “sideways” to your audience. Lastly, never leave your sand-frame in damp quarters; the result will be disastrous.

One of my biggest “hands” for many years has always been when I stand up, extract the cards slowly and carefully from the frame, and fit the last of my “cigarette-card” to the missing corner.

. . .

THE “THREE-REPEAT TENNER.”

In this effect experience has proved the worth of the tenet that old and sound fundamentals can take fresh lustre by new presentation.

Arrange ten cards in the old sequence of from ace to ten, and you can make your eleventh card any one of the court ones you prefer for display. Take the ace, deuce, and three, one by one—thus retaining the sequence—and place them behind the court card. Do not arrange black and red cards alternately throughout; have a run of three black and two red suits—the rest alternatively, if you like; and see that all four suits are represented. With this arrangement of the four-pip card as bottom and the three-pip card on top, place down on your pack. In presenting, slide off the eleven cards, and fan out for display, and see that the court-card shows up well, and the two-pip card (two behind the court-card) also. This display defies any detection of sequence. Remark:—

“With this handful of cards I am going to attempt to illustrate the sympathy that can exist between us, ladies and gentlemen. I want some one of you to decide privately on any number—and as all numbers can be represented from one to ten, we will, for convenience

and time, limit ourselves to those, *including* the one and ten. Then, having decided the number, I want you to take a corresponding number of cards from this handful, *one at a time from the bottom to the top*. Say you decide on the number three—then one at a time, do this. (Illustrate.) *Not* this please. (As you again illustrate, you replace the three cards, and thus have the cards back in the original sequence, with the four-pip at the bottom.) *Not* from the *top* to the *bottom*, but from the *bottom* to the *top*. Will anyone? Will you? Thank you, sir. Now, to obviate any idea of collusion and signs from anybody, I will leave the room while you are doing this, and you may also do it with your hands under the table, or turn your back on the company—I think they will forgive you in the interests of art—and please call out when you are ready.”

On receiving the call, you re-enter the room, take the cards from the volunteer, and holding them face down, say:—

“Now the interesting fact about this is that you will note I do not even trouble to look at the cards, but (having cut to fourth card down, display its face to the volunteer) the number of pips on that card represent the number of cards you shifted.”

After confirmation, continue:—

“Now I will endeavour to show you in a different way this power of sympathy.” (Illustrate as before what the procedure is, and during this get the ten-pip card—taking care to retain the sequence—onto the bottom.) “Will someone else, please? Would you like to try—thank you, madam. From the bottom to the top—*one at a time*: any number from one to ten.”

On your second re-entry, pause in front of your volunteer, and say: “Now, watch—quick as a flash this time!” (Briskly take packet, and flourish with other hand.) “One-two-three!” (Slap bottom card smartly and loudly, and remove in palm, revealing the correct “sympathetic number.”) Proceed:—

“Now, without I hope boring you, I should like to show you this ‘sympathetic wave’ in just one more aspect. Will you, sir, please sit right over in this corner (select furthest corner of room from the door) with this small table in front of you (or second chair, if small table is not available). Now, sir, as the others before—select any number from one to ten you please.” (Hand him packet with the seven-pip on the bottom; the reason for this I will recount later.) “From bottom—*one at a time* (this repetition is essential for safety, even with intelligent audiences) to the top.”

Here we come to the finale, with which I have acquired an enormous amount of effect and applause, out of all proportion to the

"self working" secret. Can you, reader, act a little? Right—well, here we go! :—

On your third re-entry into the room, stay right by the door, and lean nonchalantly against the jamb. Produce a cigarette, and say :

"This time I do not propose even to touch the cards." (Calmly light your cigarette while the significance of this remark sinks in.) "Please keep quite still everyone" (this to avoid your line of vision being interrupted) "and will you, sir, *slowly* and *deliberately*" (this is also essential to emphasise, as some experienced card-players deal quickly, and your denouement will be spoilt if you can not stop him at the right card) "deal the cards face down in the ordinary way of dealing on to the table (or chair) in front of you."

As he starts to deal, apparently pay more attention to your cigarette, the blowing out of your match, etc., and a general air of not being concerned with what the dealer is doing—but keep a sharp—if oblique—look-out for the seventh card. Try to utter "Stop!" in a sharp staccato style when he has this in his hand; but if he has dealt it, no matter; ask him to pick it up.

NOW—this is where you may get a surprise yourself. As many times as not I have found that the third selector chooses the number seven. Don't ask me *why*: I don't know the reason; but I do know it occurs. If it does, *without looking at the card's face himself*—for invariably he has been *counting* his deal, he will instantly confirm you with a surprised "Yes!" or "Correct." In which case, there is no need to "gild the lily" by calling attention to the pips on the card. Equally, because of counting, if it is not number seven, he may instantly say "No!" You lose nothing either way—for the sudden shock of an apparent eleventh-hour failure but adds to the successful climax when you conclude quite calmly :—

"Oh, no; turn that card over, please, and show its demonination."

The bigger the room, the better the effect, of course. The oft-suggested solution of marked cards is thoroughly exploded; and those who know of them, with small differences of design in the backs; spots; marks; "golden-glows" and what-not, are amazed. So, curiously enough, have been some of those who know—or said they did—the old "ten-card" secret.

There are many more pitfalls for the conjuror than for any other kind of entertainer. It is true that no two performances are ever *exactly* alike for any type of performer; but as a conjuror's relationship to his audience is more individual and more personal than most

other artists', so are the risks, manifold as the advantages may be. The knowledge, or lack of it in an assistant from the audience—mostly voluntary, in spite of a performer's justifiable and experienced effort to select for himself an intelligent member—is entirely unpredictable.

Although it would be much rarer in these days of popular whist-drives to find people who were entirely ignorant of the nomenclature and value of playing-cards, quite early in my public appearances I learnt that a good many adults did not know a club from a spade, or a king from a jack. On my initial experience of this with an adult, I extricated myself and my "assistant" by disappearing the whole pack of cards, and saying I couldn't remember any of them myself, either, —and "out of sight was out of mind"—went on with another item in which I engaged his nominal co-operation. A performer who extracts cheap laughs by subjecting a voluntary helper to indignities of any kind, or even fails to "share" any minor incident of hesitation or tongue-twisting to which nervous, or even keen helpers are prone, so that the performer takes the brunt of the "being laughed at" feeling—a performer who does one, or fails in the other, is a bad artist.

My first experience of the ignorance of the names of cards was typified in a boy of about nine years of age—a quite normal and natural state of things for which I should have been prepared before commencing the particular illusion. It had a very happy conclusion, though, for upon asking him the name of the card he had selected, he replied, "A king!"

"Yes, Peter," I prompted—I always make an exchange of Christian names as a preliminary introduction with juvenile "helps"—"what king?"

"The rude, red one!" he piped up.

"The rude, red ——" I began, bewildered.

"Yes sir,—y'know; he's doin' this!" Turning his head sideways to the audience, he put up his hand with his thumb nearly touching his nose. To a roar of appreciative laughter from the audience, I shouted "Right!" and hurling the pack at a decorative sword on a stand, the King of Diamonds appeared transfixed on its point—"the rude, red king"—doing exactly what Peter had illustrated. Seldom is a unrehearsed contribution so successful as was that one!

Writing of card tricks reminds that once I had a very penetrating criticism passed by a friend. He said:—

"Yes: card tricks vary in effect, but while some are very puzzling, all are explicable under three headings: 1. Pre-arrangement of

position of cards. 2. Mechanical cards and devices. 3. Sleight-of-hand, or manipulative methods. Now, a card trick that defied those three groups of solutions would be a 'real mystery' indeed—a piece of real 'magic.'” Endeavouring to construct an effect that would transcend those very comprehensive classifications, I devised the following effect.

A pack of 52 cards, each with a small hole punched in its centre. These are threaded onto a yard length of cord by a member of the audience, who retains the cord throughout the rest of the act. A card is *then* just *named*. The performer then drops a handkerchief over the pack, still threaded upon the cord held in the hands of the assistant, and whipping away the handkerchief a moment later, displays the named card, untorn, with the hole intact in its centre, free of the cord, and grasped in the performer's hand. The final and convincing stage of the trick is where the assistant then looks through the pack, still strung upon the cord, verifies that there are now only 51 cards, and that the card he has named himself is the one freed from the cord and is required to complete the pack.

The foregoing is an actual effect which pleased my critical suggestor. No; I am not going to divulge the subtle—and yet in a way, simple—secret of that “real mystery”; but in the following narrative I disclose the method because it exemplifies that the “acting” quality is an essential component to sleight-of-hand, and that the “casual” and properly-timed movement, which carries the double cargo of “naturalness” and deception, is nearer the workable truth than is the lightning-like and mostly fictitious, “quickness of hand.”

Of half Irish and half Scots parentage—on his own representation—and with a very “chancy” temper, a certain Captain O'D. was an uncomfortable proposition to his brother officers when the worse for liquor. To the rank-and-file at these times he was a positive menace.

Walking back one night to an Officers' Convalescent Hospital, where I was acting Q.M.S., I heard the voice of Captain O'D. hailing me with a wealth of sulphurous and lurid “trimmings.” He had witnessed my performance at a concert which some artists in the Division had organised, and which we had presented, with the object of raising funds for a few of the French folk in the surrounding area who had proved good friends.

Stumbling up to me, he started by offensive references to the price we charged for admission; then some outrageous slanders about the

caste and the personnel thereof; and ended up by trying to bet me that I couldn't "put over" any sleight-of-hand tricks on *him* with cards. No one on earth was cleverer than *he* was with cards, etc., etc. It was perfectly true that he was "good with the pasteboards" and was alive to most moves that "sharpers" have in their repertoire; but his general air of quarrelsome and argumentative assertion, robbed his performance of any value as entertainment.

"Look here, sir," I cut in on his unwarrantable taunts of one of a commissioned class to a member of the non-commissioned, "I'll guarantee to plant something 'on you' in the way of card tricks if you will agree to the extra blanket-issue I have been applying for this week."

The October of that year was particularly cold, but like most of his kidney, Captain O'D. took a perverse delight in keeping to the letter of the law, letting our own men of the Ambulance suffer no small amount of misery by refusing to put forward by ten days the official "Winter issue" of blankets.

My suggestion was greeted in exactly the way I had anticipated; but knowing the distorted temper that passes for pride with this sort, I waited until the stream of official bluster abated, and then said, "What is it to do with you if I want to benefit others? Let's accept *your* label that I only seek popularity. *You* issued the challenge that you'd bet me *anything* that I couldn't 'put across' any card manipulation which you couldn't explain or do. If you want to retract—"

Not to bore the reader with the subsequent argument, Captain O'D. at last made the conditions of the bet—20 francs to the blanket-issue—that I could not display any card manipulation in the Officers' Mess, in the Rest Hospital, that he could not "explain," and that his fellow officers were to decide.

As I had feared, I was compelled to use a pack of cards supplied by Captain O'D. They had a curious and rather modernistic design on their backs. To opening jeers, I counted them to see that a full pack was there. "Couldn't you tell by the feel? Any ordinary race-course tout and three-card man would be able to do so, leave alone 'experts' like you are supposed to be," he assured the company. (He never knew how useful that slow counting of the whole pack was to me!)

With his deliberate and concentrated attention of the sulky and contemptuous "drinker," I knew that no clever or subtle manipulation was going to solve my problem, for he would work out a *reasonable sounding* hypothesis for nearly everything; and yet I knew that some genuine sleight-of-hand would be necessary.

I started with the exhibition of a few personal favourites, and to Captain O'D.'s immediate jeers at the first one, I informed him that I was not endeavouring to win the bet yet, but was merely hoping to amuse the company for a few minutes, if they did not object. Here a chorus of acclaim arose. I then added that I hoped to cope with the challenge later in the evening. My opponent, not knowing when this would be, was kept on the rack deliberately for twenty minutes, watching me with a concentrated effort that must have made his head spin. Much to his surprise, and to the surprise of most there, I announced when I was about to attempt to win the bet. Immediately with an "Ah!" Captain O'D. momentarily relaxed, prior to a more lynx-eyed and alert attitude than ever—and in that momentary hiatus, I achieved my purpose!

Squaring-up Captain O'D.'s cards, I placed the pack on the table, and asked the company to elect their own member, who was to extract two cards from the pack in any way he pleased. It was obvious by Captain O'D.'s attitude that *he* wished to operate himself; and after some desultory and rather thinly-disguised "discussion," so it was. With an excess of caution, he slowly extracted two cards and placed them separately upon the table, and some way from the rest of the pack. I asked another member present to turn them up, show their faces to the company, and then hand them to me. The Two-of-Spades and the Queen-of-Diamonds were revealed, and taking one in either hand, I slowly stepped across the room, between files of staring eyes, and twisting each card so that alternatively the face and the back of each was displayed, I dropped them into the blazing and open fire which was heating the mess-room. A stillness, which seem to be one large question-mark, settled on the company. Making one or two slow and deliberate passes with my hands over the glowing surface of the fire, I returned to the table and picked up the pack, "riffled," and replacing the cards with a dropping "plop!" I announced, "The two cards are now restored; and the pack is once again a complete pack of fifty-two cards!"

And so they found them to be!

The resultant applause was abruptly checked by a very definite snarl from Captain O'D.:—"I know!—that (adjectived) carton had the 'joker' and a specimen-card —"

"Which are still there!" I finished up, displaying them in the card-container, or carton, which accompanies each pack.

I played-up to avert any uncomfortable aftermath, and immediately after everybody had satisfied themselves that full pack of 52 cards, including the two burnt-and-restored ones were genuinely there—

established by the "stacking" into suits of the whole pack—I proceeded to some further effects under the puzzled and sullen glare of the Captain. His silence was eloquent of his defeat; as had been the swift explosion of his suggested solution. And yet, if only he had known it, I *had* burnt the "joker" and the specimen-card; and if anyone had looked into the carton at that juncture, where the "joker" and the specimen-card were reposing I should have been "sunk," for they, of course, had an ordinary and differently designed back. The momentary interval, which I have described earlier, was when I availed myself of the opportunity to introduce these from the pack with which I had equipped myself before entering the room. In casually showing their faces by sliding them down from the carton with a "kindly-serene" air in answer to the Captain's last desperate challenge, I had "double-bluffed" him and the company, and finished off with the subtle "suggestion" of displaying the repeated design *on the back of the carton itself* between my fingers as I replaced the cards—both of which, of course, had an entirely conventional and different design on their backs! (I was not equipped with a card wallet, though its advantage here is obvious.)

To be exact, I should state that my substitute "joker" card was also slightly different on its face-design from the original, but not enough for Captain O'D. to detect it in his disappointment. Also, to avoid any later "discoveries" I calmly walked off with his pack and the carton with my own two cards in it. In the circumstances I had no compunction about that.

I need not labour here the comparative ease, for a conjuror, of displaying four cards as two, and while making great play at the impossibility of duplicating cards of that weirdly-designed back, to drop them back-uppermost onto the fire (that is, the "joker" and sample-card of *his* pack) after displaying alternately the face of their "cover" (really chosen cards) and employing my own favourite method for retaining these—and, finally, the almost elementary re-introduction of them back to their own pack.

And then, a few minutes later, occurred the conception of one of those anti-climaxes which, when one has been successful in a battle of wits, seem to offer themselves as a natural corollary. As it did not matter now whether I succeeded or not, the slight risk of failure, which I then took, did not deter me. It was overcome in the brilliant fashion which Fortune knows how to award to those who nigh flout her.

I said that my concluding effect that night would be with the same pack of cards supplied by Captain O'D. I asked him to take any card

and write his signature across it. He did so, across the Queen of Clubs. Still retaining this, I glided the rest of the pack back into the carton (where my own two cards were still reposing), pocketed the lot, and with a "Good-night, gentlemen!—*the lady will precede you, Captain O'D.!*", I stepped behind a screen that was in one corner of the room—and *spin-glided the card through the open window behind the screen, where it flashed across the gravel-drive, over two small grass-borders, and through the ventilator opening of Captain O'D.'s hut, some fifteen yards away!*

To the layman who has never experimented with playing-cards in the fashion that schoolboys used to flick cigarette pictures—held between index and middle fingers, and then released in the desired direction by a swift "flick" of the wrist—the foregoing may sound rather a "tall order." Those who saw the late "Chung Ling Soo" (W. E. Robinson) do the same thing, selecting any *individual* member of the audience who held up a hand, and even at the back of the gallery of the largest Music Hall, unerringly speed a card to each claimant, will realise that mine was a comparatively modest effort. The one doubtful point was that when the card struck the *inward* sloping ventilator beading, it might fall *outside* the hut. But as I have indicated, fortune was in a smiling mood. That card ricocheted off the ventilator-frame, and glided sideways onto a small table standing by the bed, where it remained precariously balanced against a water-carafe. This greeted the goggle-eyed Captain some two minutes later, and who, according to subsequent accounts, spent most of the rest of that night in a "third-degree" inquisition of his poor batman. This latter could only swear that no one had called; and that he had not shifted off his seat by the door in the small quarters leading to the Captain's bedroom.

My colleagues slept warmer, or, at least without resort to "improvised" bed clothes, from the following night onwards.

Like most sceptical natures, Captain O'D. showed signs of veering to the other extreme when certain factors evaded his own self-estimated capacities. Twice he engaged me afterwards in uncharacteristic fashion by quietly trying to "draw me out" on what I thought of "spiritualism" and the (supposedly) allied occult manifestations. The puzzle of that signed playing-card must have shaken him very much.

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